DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 434 173 UD 033 102

AUTHOR Cairney, Trevor H.

TITLE Examining the Literacy Practices of Home, School, and Community: When Does Difference Make a Difference?

PUB DATE 1999-04-00

NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 19-23, 1999).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Comprehension; *Cultural Awareness; Curriculum; Diversity (Student); Elementary Education; English; *Family Influence; Foreign Countries; *Literacy; *Multicultural Education; *Student Characteristics

IDENTIFIERS Australia

ABSTRACT

A mismatch between the intended purpose of a curriculum strategy and the discourse understandings of students that enable them to engage in the activity is a common occurrence when the purposes of the curriculum strategy are not apparent to the students. This is more likely to happen in schools in multicultural societies. Experiences in a long-term research project in Australia illustrate the differences that can occur in negotiating culture in the classroom due to differences in use of literacy. The match and mismatch between the literacy of home and school have been explored in a variety of Australian schools and communities. In the first phase of the project, case studies of four schools with innovative literacy practices were conducted. The second phase involved detailed observation and discourse analysis of the literacy practices of 35 students from the case study (years 6 and 7). The most recent work focused on detailed studies of student literacy practices and analysis of student, teacher, parent, and community member views of English literacy and support of English literacy in school and the community. Literacy was variously constructed as knowledge, performance, negotiated meaning making, and "doing" school. Research results show that successfully negotiating school literacy involves learning the norms and expectations and ways of participating that are valued in school contexts. Shared understanding is critical to making literacy learners of students. (Contains 29 references.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 434 173

Examining the literacy practices of home, school and community: When does difference make a difference?

Trevor H. Cairney
University of Western Sydney

Paper presented to the
American Educational Research Association Conference,
Montreal, Canada, 19-23 April, 1999

Professor Trevor H. Cairney
Office of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research),
University of Western Sydney,
P.O. Box 10 Kingswood, NSW, 2747.
Australia
Fax: 61 247 364 186
Email: t.cairney@uws.edu.au
Homepage: http://www.nepean.uws.edu.au/research/pvc_research/

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Trevor H Cairney

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

UD 033102

Examining the literacy practices of home, school and community: When does difference make a difference?

Introduction

I met Ralph as part of a national research project concerned with the match and mismatch between the literacy practices of home and school (Cairney & Ruge, 1998). Ralph is an Indigenous Australian employed as a teacher within Woodgate Elementary[1] school within the inner city region of Sydney Australia. He is responsible for a variety of special programs for the Indigenous students who make up 45% of the school's population. His insights concerning the way Indigenous students negotiated the curriculum provided our research team with valuable insights into the special struggles that minority students have in schools. From my very first contact Ralph readily shared personal stories concerning his experiences with his students. A common theme in his stories was the struggle that his students often had "getting" what the intentions of the curriculum activities were each day. As he commented, "Often, they just don't get it!". One example of this emerged on our very first day in the school.

> Just last week I was trying to teach the Koori[2] kids some maths and I thought I'd try to use a concrete example. And some of the kids just didn't get it. I was trying to explain some basic subtraction using the example of eating oranges to make it real. The conversation went something like this. I said to them, "Now I want you to tell me what would happen if I had 5 oranges and then gave 3 of them away?" Out of the blue Sharon pipes up next to me and says: "Where are the oranges?" I ignored her. I asked again, "How many would I have left?" She piped up again, "What'd you do with them oranges?" I said to her (quietly, and as an aside), "There aren't any oranges really." She came back at me, "What'd you do with them?" I said to her (a bit frustrated by now), "There aren't any oranges!" She comes back again, "Why'd you give 'em away, we could've eaten them oranges."

Ralph was experiencing first hand what many teachers experience every day, a mismatch between the intended purpose of the curriculum strategy and the discourse understandings of the student that enable her to engage with the activity. This occurs when the purposes for which literacy are being used in the classroom are not apparent to our students. When this occurs, there is often confusion, misunderstanding and sometimes inattentiveness and misbehaviour. This can often be misinterpreted by the teacher as lack of ability or even disobedience.

---

[1] All place and personal names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of all participants of the research described in this article.

[2] "Koori" is an Aboriginal word that is used by some indigenous Australians who primarily along the east coast.

In our work in multiple sites over the last 5 years we have found that one of the great challenges for schools in diverse multicultural societies is how they cater for the needs of all students within traditional school structures. In particular, we have found that teachers struggle day by day to work out how to acknowledge and build on the language and cultural diversity of the students who enter their schools. The acquisition of English literacy has been one of the major priorities for teachers within such schools. But the achievements of schools have been mixed, with differing levels of success in meeting the diverse needs of all learners.

Negotiating culture in the classroom

Increasingly, teachers work with classes characterised by considerable cultural and social diversity. In the multicultural Australia of the 1990s an average class in almost any town or city will have students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. In some classes, the majority of children will be from non-English speaking backgrounds. Classrooms are dynamic places where schooling is enacted. In the process, students and their teachers construct and take for granted multiple definitions of teacher, student, knowledge, values and so on (Fernie, Kantor & Klein, 1988; Green, Kantor & Rogers, 1991). Classrooms are an active site for negotiating culture. But whose culture, and on what (and whose) terms is this culture negotiated? And more importantly, what impact do such practices have on the achievement of all students like Sharon?

We already know a number of things about the complex variations that occur in literacy learning across specific groups. Heath (1983) has shown that talk associated with literacy within the home is related to differences in culture and language. We have further evidence to suggest that there are variations in literacy practices in rural when contrasted with urban schools and communities (Breen et al, 1994). As well, we have data on the varied nature of family and community literacy practices in home, school and community settings (e.g., Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie, 1995; Freebody & Ludwig, 1995; Teale, 1984; Wells, 1985).

We also know much more about the effect of instructional practices on children's literacy development. For example, we know that the way teachers shape classroom discourse is at times limited in scope and not reflective of the diversity of student language and culture (Cairney & Ruge, 1998; Cairney, Lowe & Sproats, 1995[3]; Freebody & Ludwig, 1995; Gutierrez, 1993). As well, there is some evidence to suggest that changes in classroom programs and environments can be made to make them more reflective of the cultural and linguistic diversity of students (e.g., Neumann & Roskos, 1995).

[3] This research project was an exploration of the literacy practices of year 6 and 7 children at home and school and the support given to them in these varied contexts. Its many findings included the observation that even the limited variations that were observed in literacy practices at school, and the support given to these, was more closely related to teachers' pedagogy than student diversity in culture and language.

It is obvious that literacy practices vary enormously from family to family (Cairney & Ruge, 1988), but also within families based on factors as diverse as age and gender (Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe & Munsie, 1995). While there are similarities in the literacy practices of differing families in relation to the artefacts of literacy (e.g., specific texts, forms of writing) and the literacy events experienced (e.g. school homework is common), there is also great variation in the purposes for which literacy is used, the way children's literacy is supported, the demonstrations of literacy observed, attitudes towards literacy, the role that family members play in children's literacy learning, and the value placed upon literacy learning.

In contrast to these findings are those from other projects which have shown that there is far less diversity in the literacy of schooling (Cairney, Lowe, Sproats, 1995; Freebody, Ludwig & Gunn, 1995). But not only can literacy practices be similar across schools, so too can the roles that teachers play. It seems that to be a teacher in any school demands specific ways of using language, behaving, interacting, and adherence to sets of values and attitudes, (Gee, 1990) and that this does not necessarily vary depending on the characteristics of learners. In short, curriculum is not always well matched to student needs.

Scribner and Cole's (1981) work showed us that what matters is not literacy as an isolated skill, but the social practices into which people are enculturated (or apprenticed) as members of specific social groups. In other words, we might well spend in-ordinate amounts of time looking for 'magic bullet' literacy methods, while ignoring the mismatches that are occurring daily between our literacy curriculum and our students. Bourdieu (1977) has argued that schools actually inconsistently tap the social and cultural resources of society, privileging specific groups by emphasising particular linguistic styles, curricula and authority patterns. Coe (1995) has also pointed out that even the way in which 'school achievement' is defined and assessed can disadvantage certain groups of students. He argued that schools fail to recognise that literacy is situated, that it varies according to the context and purposes for which it is used, and that a person may be highly literate within one situation and not in another.

Foster (1992) suggested that research over the past two decades or so "has found that many of the difficulties African-American students encounter in becoming literate result in part from the misunderstandings that occur when the speaking and communication styles of their community vary from those expected and valued in the school setting" (p.303). Foster recognised that research has contributed to our understanding of differences in language use at home and at school, has helped us to recognise the contextually specific nature of language use, and has demonstrated that classrooms are cultures with culturally specific ways of using language. However, she argued that it has "done little to advance our ability to use knowledge about cultural and linguistic differences to improve classroom learning" (p.304) and, in particular, has had little impact on creating classroom environments, pedagogy, or curricula "specifically designed to improve the literacy learning of African-American

children" (p. 308). Foster suggested that part of the reason for this is that researchers have concentrated on explaining
cultural discontinuities and differences in linguistic codes, and have devoted little attention to differences in interactional styles and ways of using language at home and at school.

Willis (1995) similarly has argued that children from cultural and linguistic minority groups continue to have difficulty in achieving school success because the dominant pedagogical approaches are based on "a narrow understanding of school knowledge and literacy, which are defined and defended as what one needs to know and how one needs to know it in order to be successful in school and society" (p.34).

Several researchers have investigated the impact of differences between the cultural beliefs and expectations of Native Americans, and those of mainstream cultural groups (Deyhle & LeCompte, 1994; Locust, 1989; McCarty, 1987). For example, Locust (1989) examined traditional native American belief systems, including their holistic approach to life and death, their emphasis on non-verbal communication, and their valuing of visual, motor and memory skills over verbal skills. She investigated the ways in which these beliefs conflict with the education system, and argued that traditional psychological education tests reflect the dominant culture resulting in native American children achieving low scores and being treated as learning disabled.

Like Locust (1989), Deyhle and LeCompte (1994) argued that cultural differences in expectations and approaches result in the low school achievement of native American children in middle schools. Through an in-depth case study of one middle school, they showed how some features of the educational structure and pedagogy were congruent with Navajo culture, while many were not. They argued that "Navajo children face conflict not only because their parents' conceptions of proper ways to raise children are different from those of Anglos, but also because of a related set of differences in attitudes and beliefs about stages in child development" (p. 157). They found that although many educators at the school were genuinely interested in good teaching, cultural differences other than language were ignored, rendered invisible, or considered to be irrelevant. As a consequence, few teachers made any alterations to their teaching to accommodate their predominantly Navajo population, and the school encouraged parental involvement only so that it could impose school sanctioned expectations and practices.

Classrooms are dynamic interactional spaces where individuals come together for the purpose of schooling to construct situated definitions of teacher, student, knowledge, values, and so on (Fernie et al, 1988; Green, Kantor & Rogers, 1991). Hence, "the culture of the classroom can be seen as a dynamic system of values, beliefs, and standards, developed through understandings which the teacher and the students have come to share" (Au, 1993, p. 9). Recognising classrooms as cultures entails acknowledging that literacy in classrooms is more than reading and writing, that "it also involves the communicative processes through which it is constructed" (Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1992, p.121).

Using the methodology of interactional sociolinguistics, the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group (1992) has shown how literate actions and what counts as literacy are constructed through the actions and interactions with and about text that occur in everyday classroom situations. They point out that students construct a model of literacy based on the literate actions in which they engage, and that the model or models that are constructed reflect school literacy and may support or constrain students' use of literacy in contexts outside the classroom. Thus, "student actions and statements (are) a patterned way of acting or communicating that students have learned from the opportunities afforded them in ... classrooms" (p.145) and do not necessarily reflect students' ability. This understanding helps teachers like Ralph to understand the seemingly 'low level' responses of students like Sharon.

Puro & Bloome (1987) have highlighted both the explicit and implicit nature of classroom communication in instruction. They suggest that the "implicit influence of classroom communication on instruction is often overlooked, yet it has powerful effects on instruction and on what children learn in school" (p.26). They point out that communication is interpreted using more than just the explicit content of the message, and that the interactional context is taken into account when teachers and students communicate with each other. They go further in suggesting that the interactional context is not something that simply exists in the classroom (or anywhere else), but is constructed by teachers and students in their interactions with each other. Puro and Bloome argue that classroom learning includes "learning the academic and social processes for acquiring knowledge and acquiring new learning strategies" (p.28), and that what constitutes classroom learning will be different for different students, depending on their social roles and status as well as differences in the frames of reference that students bring to the classroom. They define the concept of procedural display as "teachers and students displaying to each other those interactional behaviours necessary to get through a lesson without necessarily engaging the substantive content of the lesson" (p.29). They argue that students contextualise what they learn in the context of communication (both explicit and implicit) in the classroom, so teachers need to examine the nature of that communication and the effects it has on students' construction of learning.

The match and mismatch in language and literacy between home/community and school is of vital importance in addressing the specific needs of all students, but in particular, those who experience difficulties with literacy and schooling. However, there is still much to be learned about this topic. What we do know is that classrooms are not simple places; they are dynamic interactional spaces where individuals come together for the purpose of schooling to construct situated definitions of teacher, student, knowledge, values and so on (Fernie et al, 1988; Green, Kantor & Rogers, 1991).

Exploring 'constructions' of literacy

Over the last 5 years I have been exploring with my students and colleagues, the match and mismatch between the literacy of home and school in a variety of schools and communities.

This work has been supported by the Australian government throughout this time and has involved 3 separate projects that have included detailed case studies of family literacy, a national evaluation of family literacy initiatives, and more recently, multiple ethnographies in varied communities. Our most recent work has sought to provide:

- detailed description and discourse analysis of the literacy practices of students in a number of different schools (primary and secondary) paying particular attention to 'school' and 'non school' literacy practices;
- parallel description and discourse analysis of the home and community literacy practices of students, and the teachers and community members with whom students have a relationship;
- description of student school achievement in literacy and learning;
- description and interpretive analysis of student, teacher, parent and community member views on English literacy and support of English literacy learning in school and community contexts.

In the first phase of the project, case studies were conducted of four schools (one secondary and three elementary) which had been identified as adopting innovative strategies to acknowledge and respond to differences in the language and literacy practices of the communities they serve. The second phase involved detailed observation and discourse analysis of the literacy practices of 35 case study children as they move in and out of home, school and community contexts that involve the use of literacy. The case study students provided a methodological procedure to enable sampling of events leading to meaningful observations in the diverse language and literacy contexts experienced by the students. These students were chosen to reflect diversity in culture, age, gender, ability and social class.

The method of tracking individual students through their real world literacy contexts involved the collection of the following forms of data including:

- interview data from students, parents, teachers and other community support workers (where applicable);
- student, parent and teacher self reporting of their own literacy practices utilising time sampling techniques;
- observation of literacy practices at school, home and in the community utilising participant observation, self audio taping of interactions and video taping (eg. homework, story reading, playing literacy-related games, discussion of school activities).
- audio recording of specific literacy events (eg. story reading at home and school; homework discussion at home and school; research/project work discussion and completion at home and school);
- data on student achievement to enable comparisons to be made between high and low achieving students.

The project has also involved the recruitment of child and family members as co-researchers who collect data and meet regularly with the researchers to share the data and help to interpret

it. This has involved the co-researchers in the collection of data on, and the recording of a range of home literacy events. In our most recently completed project, a total of one hundred and thirty home literacy events were recorded (Cairney & Ruge, 1998).

Classroom observations were conducted in a total of eight classrooms across the three participating primary schools. In addition, classroom observations were conducted across seven subject areas in Years 7 and 9 in the participating secondary school. A total of eighty two days of classroom observation were conducted across the four schools. A number of questions were explored in the study but one of particular relevance to the topic of this paper was "How do different interactional structures and ways of participating in literacy events contribute to the construction of different views of literacy?"

As Gutierrez (1994) has suggested, there is a close relationship between patterns of interaction among members of groups and context. Both are constructed and reconstructed as participants engage in specific literacy practices. Context and the scripts that shape interaction, are mutually reflexive. This reflexivity in turn shapes the nature of the literacy opportunities and practices.

The data from this study showed that participants (students, teachers, and family members) adopted different roles and relationships, norms and expectations, and ways of participating in literacy-related events (Cairney & Ruge, 1998). These three elements contributed to the construction of differing views of literacy, and differing notions of what constitutes literate action which help us to make sense of the struggles that teachers like Ralph face each day in communicating his intentions and purposes to students.

Four distinct 'constructions of literacy' were identified through the discourse analyses in this study: literacy as knowledge, literacy as performance, literacy as negotiated construction of meaning, and literacy as 'doing school'. In what follows, each of these constructions or views of literacy is explored and illustrated with examples drawn from the transcript data.

Literacy as Knowledge

One set of interactions in our study was characterised by social and linguistic factors which contributed to the construction of a particular view of literacy best described as 'literacy as knowledge'. In these interactions, one participant (usually an adult) fulfilled the role of *monitor of knowledge*, while other participant(s) were accountable for reproducing knowledge to participate successfully in the literacy event.

In the following interaction from a Year 1 classroom (Transcript 1), the teacher and students (including Carl and Jeffery) were engaged in an extended question-answer sequence related to the text *Lester and Clyde Run Scared*. The teacher initiated all of the questions in the exchange and acted as arbiter of the children's responses. The children were required to participate by displaying their knowledge, not only of the text itself, but of the habits of creatures called 'feral cats'.

Transcript 1: The 'Feral Cat' transcript - Grade 1.

56	T:	Carl
57		what's a feral cat?
58	C:	*(inaudible)*
59	T:	How did it get there?
60	C:	it got lost
61	T:	it could have
62	S:	it might have been hunting food
63	T:	They might have let it free to hunt food but-
64	S:	It might have been that human's cat
65	T:	yes
66		it might not have been *that* human's cat
67		but at some stage it might have been a human's cat.
68		What do you think the humans had done to it?
69	S:	*(inaudible)*
70	T:	I think the humans might have had the cat at their house.
71		Do they have the cat at their house any more?
72	Ss:	Nooo
73	T:	Where is the cat living now Mike?
74	M:	At the pond
75	T:	at the pond
76		does anybody love that cat any more?
77	Ss:	No

Some of the knowledge that the students were required to produce in this event was directly related to the text (eg. "Where is the cat living now, Mike?" "At the pond." "Does anybody love that cat any more?" "No."). Other knowledge, however, was drawn from students' everyday knowledge of feral cats (eg. "It might have been hunting food." "It might have been that human's cat."). As the transcript illustrates, the focus of this particular literacy event was not simply to construct meaning from the text, but to reproduce knowledge about feral cats.

The construction of *literacy as knowledge* was found at home as well as at school, but was less common at home and was found most frequently amongst families from non-English speaking backgrounds, particularly when adults from these families assisted children with homework tasks.

Literacy as Performance

A second set of interactions analysed in this project was characterised by a view or construction of literacy that we have called 'literacy as performance'. In these interactions, one or more participants (usually children) were held accountable (usually by adults) for demonstrating a certain level of proficiency in a literacy-related task. The focus of these interactions was on the performance of the task, and in some instances the adult acted as arbiter of the quality of the performance.

The following exchange has been reconstructed from detailed field notes. Stuart (grade 1) and some of his classmates had just completed a worksheet in which they had to 'fill in' the number preceding each of the numbers on the page, then colour in the pictures on the worksheet. The teacher apparently judged that Stuart had not done the task well enough, even though all his numbers were correct.

Transcript 2: The 'Beautiful Work' exchange - Year 1.

01	T:	Stuart, can you see the difference between that and that? I would do that again, so it was beautiful. Do you like beautiful work?
02		*Stuart nods.*
03	T:	Can you fix that up?
04		*Stuart shakes head.*
05	T:	Let's get another sheet for you. Stuart, don't forget the lines. We need to keep inside the lines so drawings look beautiful.
06	S:	I think it's better when I do the drawing.
07	T:	That's why you have to be careful with other people's drawings.
		Teacher turns his attention to another child, then comments:
08	T:	He's got some great ideas on colouring in.
09	S:	And I don't?

In this exchange, there was no recognition of what Stuart counted as "doing beautiful work". The teacher's judgement of the standard of Stuart's performance was based solely on the teacher's criteria - keeping inside the lines. To Stuart, however, having the opportunity to produce his own picture to be coloured in counted as part of the performance. When the teacher commented on another child's work (line 08), Stuart's response ("And I don't") showed that he was aware of the differences between his own view of "doing beautiful work" and the teacher's view. Not surprisingly, the teacher's view prevailed.

The construction of literacy as performance was evident not only in many classroom transcripts, but also in some recorded family interactions. Once again, this was most common in homework sessions. Varenne and McDermott (1986) recognised this in their research into families' homework practices and reported that "the presence of school in the family kitchen is apparent in the way members spotlight the child's performance. Even more striking is the fact that the specific talk that is generated as part of the homework scene is structured, as school talk is structured, to isolate individual competence displays" (p. 199). This is evident in the following transcript (Transcript 3), in which John Zakos (Grade 4) and his mother use the school newsletter for reading practice.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Transcript 3: The 'School Newsletter' transcript - Zakos family.

41	M:	okay, what's next?
42	J:	play equipment
43	M:	construction
44	J:	construction after much playing and
45	M:	planning
46	J:	planning and found (.)
47	M:	fund raising
48	J:	fund raising and a (.)
49	M:	approximate
50	J:	approximate target date of them
51	M:	of term
52	J:	of term one (.) nineteen ninety seven has been set of- for
53	M:	for the
54	J:	for the inst-
55	M:	installation
56	J:	installation for the
57	M:	of the new
58	J:	of the new play equipment.

In the exchange above, Mrs Zakos provides support for John's reading of the school newsletter text by simply telling him unknown words. There is no attempt to support the child as he attempts to construct meaning from the text. The emphasis here is on the successful performance of the task, rather than holding the child accountable for producing the knowledge required to engage in the task.

Literacy as negotiated meaning making

The third construction of literacy has been called 'literacy as negotiated meaning making'. In these interactions the focus was on creating meaning. Each participant had the right to contribute to the exchange at will. Students, for example, were not required to raise their hands and wait to be nominated by the teacher before speaking, nor did adults control the interaction by naming speakers.

The following two extracts from an extended transcript clearly illustrate this particular construction of literacy. The extracts are taken from a classroom literacy event in which a Grade 4 teacher was leading a discussion about the cover illustration of a book called *Which Habitat?* In the first section of the transcript (Transcript 4), the teacher signposted the structure of the exchange by making a statement (line 57) rather than posing a question. Students responded to the teacher's lead by offering responses (lines 58, 59, 66 & 67) without being named or otherwise nominated by the teacher.

Transcript 4: The 'Which Habitat?' transcript - Grade 4.

			Teacher	Students
56	T:	This here.		
57		I wonder whether its a, a, ..		
58	S:	ocean		
59	S:	land, land.		
60	T:	or it might be a bird		
61		a long long way away.		
63		And this bird here certainly-		
64		look at the feet on that bird		
65		there.		
66	Ss:	[*talk at once*]		
67	S:	.....it's like a duck.		

However, it was not only the structure of the exchange that alerted students to the negotiated nature of this exchange: the teacher's use of "I wonder" and "it might be" signalled that 'correct' responses in this exchange were negotiable. In lines 63-65, the teacher led the students to consider the evidence presented by the illustration in suggesting possible responses.

In the next section of this exchange (Transcript 5), students continued to offer suggestions without being nominated (lines 73 & 80) and the teacher continued to verbalise her reasoning (lines 76 & 81) rather than pose questions. Both the structure of the interaction (in which students were permitted to initiate contributions without being nominated by the teacher, and the teacher did not evaluate every student response) and the nature of the participants responses contributed to the view of literacy as negotiated construction of meaning.

Transcript 5: The 'Which Habitat?' transcript (continued)

			Teacher	Students
73	Ss:	yes, it swims		
75	T:	It swims.		
76		So it must be a bird that lives near water and perhaps feeds from the water		
80	S:	fish		
81	T:	near where it lives.		
82		From fish.		
83		So if you look at its beak it tells you that it's a water-going bird, doesn't it.		

The view of literacy negotiated meaning making was also evident in audio-recorded literacy events in a small number of families. One example of this is in the following section of transcript from the Jennings family (6). This interaction is part of a home literacy event in which Tara Jennings was writing a list of groceries the family needed to buy. All four members of the family - Mr and Mrs Jennings, Tara (Grade 5) and Stuart (Grade 1) - contributed to the list as they sat at the dinner table. At one point in the exchange, Mrs Jennings noticed the way in which Tara had written 'yogurt' on the list and uses this for a key learning event (see Transcript 6).

Transcript 6: The 'Yoghurt' transcript - Jennings family.

07	M:	hey, did you write 'spread' too Stuart?
08	S:	no
09	T:	no I did
10	M:	I was going to say it looked like two different people's writing, and Tara you can't spell 'yoghurt'
11	F:	that's all right, I can't spell 'yoghurt' either
12	M:	well I don't think the companies can spell 'yoghurt' cause 'yoghurt' always used to have an 'h' in it, now they've stopped putting it in
13	F:	(inaudible) *Tara laughs.*
14	T:	yeah.
15	M:	well how do you say it?
16	T:	yo-gurt. Yoghurt.
17	F:	*(Sings)* Yo-o-gurt.
18	M:	well it used to have an 'h' in it.
19	T:	(inaudible) a yoghurt in here so I can't see. Oh yes there is
20	M:	yeah, there's plenty of containers

21	T:	(*reads from container*) Y-O-G-U-R-T
22	F:	so you reckon if you looked it up in the Macquarie dictionary it'd give you an option with 'h' do you?
23	M:	no, I don't think it probably would
24	T:	it doesn't have an 'h'
25	M:	no it used to have
26	T:	an 'h' there?
27	M:	it used to. Go and find that old dictionary of - that was Grandad's.

Mrs Jennings' comment that Tara had made a spelling error (line 10) prompted an admission from Mr Jennings that he, too, was not a proficient speller (line 11). Mrs Jennings then questioned whether "the companies" knew how to spell because the spelling of the word had changed from 'y-o-g-h-u-r-t' to 'y-o-g-u-r-t' (line 12). What followed was a negotiation of ways to confirm the correct spelling of the word, including checking the actual containers and consulting a number of dictionaries. Through this exchange, a common view of the correct spelling of the word was negotiated among the participants. Exchanges such as this one, in which language was discussed as an object that could be held up for scrutiny, were common in the Jennings home.

Literacy as 'Doing School'

The final construction of literacy evident within our research we have called 'literacy as doing school'. This is similar to what Street (1995) meant when he noted that "the way in which rules for the engagement of participants as teachers and learners are continuously asserted and reinforced within practices supposedly to do simply with using and talking about literacy: while apparently simply giving instructions about handling a text for instance, teachers and parents are also embedding relations of hierarchy, authority and control" (p. 114).

This particular construction of literacy was only evident in classrooms, and was characterised by an emphasis on procedural displays of classroom competence rather than on the literacy demands of the task. For example, in the following extract from an audio-recorded event in a Year 1 classroom (Transcript 7), the teacher and children were preparing for a reading of the book *Lester and Clyde Run Scared.* It is evident from the transcript that the teacher's focus was on the way in which the children were sitting, rather than on talking about or focusing on literacy.

Transcript 7: The 'Enjoying a New Story' transcript - Grade 1.

010		Christopher read it for us
011	C:	Lester and Clyde Running Scared
012	T:	Run Scared
013		This is part two
014		and you will notice it is very similar to the other one
015		and the ending is very different - some very different things happen.
016		Are you ready?
017	Ss:	yes
018	T:	Are you comfortable?
019		Are your legs crossed and your hands in your lap?
020		Remembering when we are enjoying a new story we are not talking about it.

Interactions such as the one above were common in all of the classrooms in the elementary schools in this study, but were not noted in the secondary school. Kindergarten and Grade 1 children, in particular, frequently encountered this construction of literacy as they became socialised into school ways of participating and interacting.

Conclusion

The experience of Sharon and the participants involved in interactions discussed above demonstrate that successfully negotiating 'school literacy' involves learning the norms and expectations, and ways of participating, that are valued and reproduced in school contexts. In most discussions of the impact of literacy on students' school success, there is an implicit assumption that 'school literacy' is best - that what students learn at school is somehow 'better' than what they learn at home. This is reflected in Street's (1995) question: "among all of the different literacies practised in the community, the home, and the workplace, how is it that the variety associated with schooling has come to be the defining type, not only to set the standard for other varieties but to marginalise them, to rule them off the agenda of literacy debate? Non-school literacies have come to be seen as inferior attempts at the real thing, to be compensated for by enhanced schooling" (p. 106). The implication is, that any student who can competently negotiate 'school literacy' will achieve school success. Yet, this is not always the case. In some of the families in this study, the 'school literacy' that children encountered was more restricted than their home literacy experiences.

On the basis of previous research we might hypothesise that, if there are indeed matches and mismatches in home and school discourse practices, and if middle-class students are those most likely to achieve academic success, then middle-class families might be expected to show the greatest degree of 'match' between home and school. In our sample of families, the students who were most academically successful were those whose family literacy practices

reproduced school literacy practices. Those who were less academically successful did not share the home dominance of school literacy. Some, like the Jennings family, shared the home dominance of school literacy to a large extent, but their home literacy practices were not always recognised or acknowledged in school contexts. This contributed to the teacher's view of Stuart Jennings as a child who was "old before his time". Other families, like the Brennans, actively resisted the dominance of school literacy by explicitly challenging the types of 'school literacy' in which their children engaged. What was common to all these families was a preparedness to use literacy in multiple forms, to use talk about and 'play' with language, and to reflect on language and literacy as it was used for varied purposes.

Recent research on classroom interaction patterns has clearly shown that classrooms offer multiple and varied opportunities for learning (eg. Tuyay, Jennings & Dixon, 1995; Gutierrez, 1994). The extent of the opportunities for learning seemed more limited at Woodgate Public School than at the other two primary schools involved in the Home/School phase; at least in the lower grades. By concentrating their efforts on making school a place where Indigenous students want to be, the staff may have unwittingly narrowed the opportunities for learning offered in their classrooms. Yet it could be argued that it is difficult for the school to do more. Children like Jack Melville (whose school attendance was poor, and whose parents would not or could not enforce attendance) can be difficult to support. In such cases, the school could not count on the family to support school literacy agendas.

At the same time, however, it is difficult to criticise any family for an apparent lack of support for the school if they have no grounds for believing that regular school attendance, and even school achievement, will make any material difference to their social and economic circumstances. Ogbu's (1992) work on primary and secondary cultural differences would suggest that Australian Indigenous children, like children of other groups that have been dominated or repressed, face much greater difficulties than children of other minority groups. Ogbu argues that immigrant or voluntary groups interpret cultural and linguistic differences as obstacles to be overcome, whereas involuntary groups interpret these as differences to be maintained as an expression of identity. He states that both types of minority group develop a range of educational strategies that may or may not lead to school success, but that involuntary groups have a larger proportion of strategies that will not lead to success, and therefore are the groups most likely to need culturally compatible schooling. The educational experiences of the Indigenous children and families in this study suggest that further research in this area is needed.

The work that we have been conducting over the last 10 years in Australia, has had an over-riding meta-question driving it: "Why does school literacy empower some and disempower others?" We have recognised in this time that when we talk about school literacy we are not talking about a single 'entity' that is constant, but rather about 'literacies' which are changing and evolving. To make sense of or meta-question, we must therefore recognise that we are talking about the specific school literacies that particular students encounter. Hence, the school literacy that the Koori children encountered at Woodgate was different from the school

literacy that Vietnamese children encountered (for example) at St Joseph's, another key research site. Whether school literacy empowers children or not is a question about the relationship between the school literacy practices that particular children encounter, and the home literacy practices of those same children.

One important finding of this study that needs to be understood is that children from 'minority' language and cultural backgrounds are not the only ones who may find school literacy less than empowering. Many children from the dominant or mainstream culture encounter a more restricted range of literacy practices at school than the literacy practices in which they engage at home. While these children may be academically successful relative to their peers from minority backgrounds, that is they are 'good at' school literacy, their learning is nevertheless constrained by the mismatches between literacy at home and at school. For example, the school literacy that Stuart Jennings encountered certainly did not encourage him to draw on, or build on, the broad range of literacy practices in which he engaged at home. Thus, for children like Stuart, school literacy may constrain rather than empower.

"Clegg argue(d) that power is not a property held by persons, as some forms of episodic agency would have it, but that power is *relational*, and is the product of structured sets of relations among people, relations which are not attributable to or created by particular people, but are more historically, institutionally and discursively produced" (Gilbert & Low, 1994, p.7). Thus, 'empowering' students through school literacy is not simply a matter of improving students' skills in reading and writing, it is about changing the relational structures so that the whole basis of institutional power is transformed. In concrete terms, this means that empowering children like Craig (whose attempts to contribute to knowledge construction in the classroom were rejected because they constituted violations of the existing interaction patterns in the Kindergarten classroom) does not mean 'teaching' him how to interact 'appropriately' so that his knowledge will be accepted and privileged - it means accepting his knowledge regardless of how he interacts, and in so doing, changing the relational structures in which the power is based.

Sharon's teacher Ralph was provided with a critical decision to make when she responded 'inappropriately' to his question. At first he rejects her response, but eventually allows her to share her knowledge with the class. Such critical incidents are defining moments in classroom interaction. While Sharon had missed the purpose of the interaction framed by the teacher, Ralph needed to engage her without simply dismissing her knowledge as irrelevant. The teacher's handling of such discourse moments is critical for learners struggling to make sense of curriculum.

Street (1995) drew attention to "the close association of literacy practices with identity, authority, and concepts of knowledge" (p. 110). The mismatches that we found between home and school literacies were not so much in terms of literacy practices, but in terms of authority and concepts of knowledge. Matches between home and school literacy events and practices allow children to develop situated expertise which enhances or supports the

development of 'school literacy'. However, mismatches in home and school literacy practices (particularly in terms of authority structures and concepts of knowledge) constrain children's development of non-school literacies. School achievement may be ensured, but empowerment is not.

The findings of this study support Corson's (1991) contention that "education can routinely repress, dominate and disempower language users whose practices differ from the norms that it establishes. ... Whoever has the power to define the context and the language code that describes it is empowered; all others who accept that definition without question accept their own disempowerment in that setting" (p.236). In this study, it was not only those children who could not successfully negotiate 'school literacy' who were 'disempowered'.

It is clear from the evidence provided in our research that families and schools differ markedly in their literacy practices and values. What is also clear is that there are significant differences amongst families in the way they define and use literacy. Thus, knowing that a student is a member of a particular subgroup (eg. a member of a socioeconomically disadvantaged family; a recent Vietnamese immigrant; a third-generation Australian-born 'native' Arabic speaker; etc.) does not entitle us to assume anything about that student's literacy practices or 'ways of participating' in the cultural practices of the group.

The findings of this project raise a number of additional questions about the relationships between home and school literacy practices. When restrictive school literacy practices are transmitted to home, what factors contribute to whether or not parents/families acquiesce? For example, why is it that Mrs Brennan intervened on behalf of her sons, while Mrs Jennings did not? Mrs Jennings reported feeling constrained by the perception that if a parent wants to speak to a teacher there must be a problem. How do parents construct their role as supporters of their children's learning? What factors influence parents' sense of self-efficacy in improving their children's educational outcomes.

Also needed is further exploration of the role that children play as mediators between home and school. Does this role differ for different groups? How do students construct the role of mediator? How do students respond to differences between home and school? Is there any evidence that children from different minority groups respond in different ways? For example, do Koori children respond to differences by clinging to home practices, while NESB children respond by embracing school practices? If so, does this support Ogbu's (1992) theory of primary and secondary cultural differences? What do 'mainstream' or 'dominant culture' children do when faced with mismatches between home and school?

Just as Ralph needed to understand Sharon's needs and background, schools generally need to understand families and the communities within which they are situated. There is a need for genuine dialogue between schools and their communities. This involves more than simply giving information and advice to families about how they can conform to school curricula. Harry (1992) argues that schools must forge collaborative relationships that create mutual

understanding between parents and teachers - a "posture of reciprocity". It is only when teachers and community members talk with and listen to each other that shared knowledge and understanding develops. Such shared understanding is critical to the making of literacy learners who can use literacy for varied purposes in and out of school.

Teachers and parents need to understand the way each defines, values and uses literacy as part of cultural practices. Such mutual understanding offers the potential for schooling to be adjusted to meet the needs of families. As well, it offers parents the opportunity to observe and understand the literacy of schooling, a literacy which ultimately empowers individuals to take their place in society.

References

Au, K. (1993). *Literacy instruction in multicultural settings.* Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In J. Karabel & A.H. Halsey (Eds), *Power and Ideology in Education*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Breen, M.P., Louden, W., Barratt-Pugh, C., Rivalland, J., Rohl, M., Rhydwen, M., Lloyd, S. & Carr, T. (1994). *Literacy in its place: Literacy practices in urban and rural communities, Vols 1 & 2.* Perth: DEET.

Cairney, T.H., Lowe, K. & Sproats, E. (1995). *Literacy in Transition: An investigation of the literacy practices of upper primary and junior secondary schools* (Vols 1-3).

Cairney, T.H. & Ruge, J. (1998). *Community literacy practices and schooling: Towards effective support for students.* Vols 1 & 2, Canberra: Department of Employment, Education and Training.

Cairney, T.H., Ruge, J., Buchanan, J., Lowe, K. & Munsie, L. (1995). *Developing partnerships: The home, school and community interface* (Vols 1-3). Canberra: DEET.

Coe, R. M. (1995). What Students Aren't Learning at School: Assessing students' ability to situate their discourses. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Conference, San Francisco.

Corson, D. (1991). Language, power and minority schooling. *Language and Education*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 231-253.

Deyhle, D. & LeCompte, M. (1994). Cultural differences in child development: Navajo adolescents in middle schools. *Theory Into Practice, 33*, 3, 156-166.

Fernie, D., Kantor, R. & Klein, E. (1988). Becoming students and becoming ethnographers in a preschool. *Journal of Childhood Research in Education*. Vol. 3, No. 2.

Freebody, P., Ludwig, C. & Gunn, S. (1995). *Everyday literacy practices in and out of schools in low socio-economic status urban communities: A descriptive and interpretive research program* Canberra: DEETYA.

Foster, M. (1992). Sociolinguistics and the African-American Community: Implications for Literacy. *Theory Into Practice*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4.

Gee, J. (1990). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses.* London: The Falmer Press.

Gilbert, R. & Low, P. (1994). Discourse and power in education: Analysing institutional processes in schools. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 21, 3, 1-23.

Green, J., Kantor, R. & Rogers, T. (1991). Exploring the complexity of language and learning in the classroom. In B. Jones & L. Idol (Eds) *Educational values and cognitive instruction: Implications for reform, Vol. 2*, Hillsdale (NJ): Erlbaum, pp 333-364.

Gutierrez, K.D. (1993). How talk, context, and script shape contexts for learning: A cross-case comparison of journal sharing. *Linguistics and Education*, Vol. 5, (3 & 4).

Harry, B. (1992) An ethnographic study of cross-cultural communication with Puerto Rican-American families in the special education system. *American Educational Research Journal*, 29, 471-494.

Heath, S.B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life and work in community and classrooms.* Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

Locust, C. (1989). Wounding the spirit: Discrimination and traditional American belief systems.

Ogbu, J. U. (1992). Adaptation to Minority Status and Impact on School Success. *Theory Into Practice*, Vol. XXXI. 4, 287-295.

Puro, P. & Bloome, D. (?). Understanding Classroom Communication. *Theory Into Practice*, Vol. XXVI, 1, 26-31.

Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group (1992). Constructing literacy in classrooms: Literate action as social accomplishment. In H. Marshall (Ed.), *Redefining Student Learning: Roots of Educational Change*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Scribner, S. & Cole, M. (1981). *The psychology of literacy.* Cambridge (MA):Harvard University Press.

Street, B.V. (1995). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education.* London: Longman.

Teale, W.H. (1984). Home background and young children's literacy development. In W. Teale & E. Sulzby (Eds), *Emergent Literacy* (pp 173-206). Norwood (NJ): Ablex.

Tuyay, S., Jennings, L. & Dixon, C. (1995). Classroom discourse and opportunities to learn: An ethnographic study of knowledge construction in a bilingual third-grade classroom. *Discourse Processes*, Vol. 19, 75-110.

Varenne, H. & McDermott, R. (1986). "Why" Sheila can read: Structure and indeterminacy in the reproduction of family literacy. In B. Schieffelin & P. Gilmore (Eds*), The acquisition of literacy: Ethnographic perspectives.* Norwood (NJ): Ablex.

Wells, G. (1985). Preschool literacy-related activities and success in school. In D.R. Olson, N. Torrance & A. Hildyard (Eds), *Literacy, language and learning: The nature and consequences of reading and writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Willis, A.I. (1995). Reading the world of school literacy: Contextualising the experience of a young African American male. *Harvard Educational Review, 65*, 1, 30-48.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE